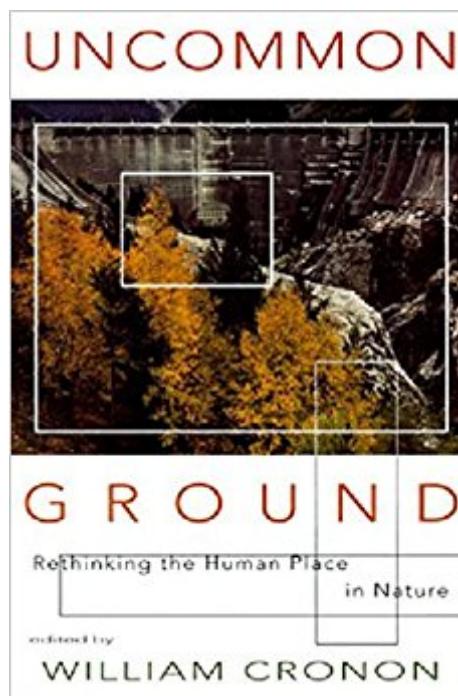


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# Uncommon Ground: Rethinking The Human Place In Nature



## **Synopsis**

A controversial, timely reassessment of the environmentalist agenda by outstanding historians, scientists, and critics. In a lead essay that powerfully states the broad argument of the book, William Cronon writes that the environmentalist goal of wilderness preservation is conceptually and politically wrongheaded. Among the ironies and entanglements resulting from this goal are the sale of nature in our malls through the Nature Company, and the disputes between working people and environmentalists over spotted owls and other objects of species preservation. The problem is that we haven't learned to live responsibly in nature. The environmentalist aim of legislating humans out of the wilderness is no solution. People, Cronon argues, are inextricably tied to nature, whether they live in cities or countryside. Rather than attempt to exclude humans, environmental advocates should help us learn to live in some sustainable relationship with nature. It is our home.

## Photographs

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In this thought-provoking collection of essays edited by environmental historian Cronon, scholars such as Carolyn Merchant, Richard White, Kenneth Olwig, Donna Haraway, and others "contribute to an ongoing dialog about the environment." The book has its roots in an interdisciplinary seminar on "Reinventing Nature," held at the University of California, Irvine's Humanities Research Institute in 1994, and is similar in scope to another Reinventing Nature project entitled Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstructionism (Island Pr., 1995). This work explores our ideas of nature in a cultural context, for "if we hope for an environmentalism capable of explaining why

people abuse the earth as they do, then the nature we study must become less natural and more cultural." By using materials such as photographs, advertisements, and paintings (termed "found objects" by Haraway) to stimulate fresh ways of viewing and responding to nature, the group has produced an enlightening work that challenges our very ideas of the natural world. Highly recommended.S. Maret, Univ. of Colorado, DenverCopyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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An intellectually pathbreaking book. -- Daniel J. KevlesAn intellectually pathbreaking book.--Daniel J. KevlesAn intellectually pathbreaking book. --Daniel J. Kevles"The best kind of book, one that shocks the reader into entirely fresh ways of thinking. --Michael Pollan"

This outstanding anthology is more than twenty years old, but nevertheless remains as important as ever. Cronon and the other authors in this anthology demonstrate that what nature "means" or "signifies" is by no means universal, but instead depends on one's historical, cultural, economic, national, and personal perspectives. This anthology helped to generate a lengthy and informative debate about the "social construction" of nature, a debate that continues. Everyone in the field of environmental studies (history, philosophy, literature, anthropology, ecology, etc.) should read this anthology.

This book is indeed about "rethinking" the environment outside of the usual realms of political advocacy. The editor, William Cronon, is an historian, and this book is the result of a multi-disciplinary conference of scholars working in surprising niches of environmental studies.What makes this anthology so important is that many of the essays in it emphasize that our views of the environment, nature, and wilderness are "narratives" that are entangled with religion, culture, politics, and race--not just science. Cronon's introduction explores the concept of "wilderness" through time to the modern preservationist notion of a pristine, human-free zone, and the quandary that idea presents: wilderness preservation requires that all humans be removed from it.This anthology contains essays about: the "Eden narrative" in 19th environmentalism (the Times reported today that the 19th's indigenous cultures are now extinct); architecture and green space; what the "work" of an environmentalist entails; the role of nationalism in the creation of the park system; a study of the cladistics of ecological thinking in the 1950s; environmentalism as social justice in the inner city, and an essay by Donna Haraway about the role of race and "nature" in science.My favorite essay, way ahead of its time, is by N. Katherine Hayles, "Simulated Nature and Natural Simulations." This

essay addresses the epistemological problem in the distinguishing between the natural and the artificial, exemplified by two studies: the classical ethological modeling of animals as machines and the claim or right to aliveness for a-life computer parasites."Uncommon Ground" is just a dip in the waters. Sorely missing from this volume is E.O. Wilson's theory of "biophilia," which has been forgotten by almost everyone but selfish-gene proponents. Also missing is an economist's perspective of how industry's "use value" of a resource explodes beyond the point where it can be gauged in an environmental context. Take Superfund sites or the current oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. A quick profit on a resource--boosting workers for a time--can ultimately destroy their property values, recreational and subsistence use of wildlife, and the priceless and unknown values of ancestral/family claims, biodiversity, and health for decades, if not all time.

Highly recommend this book; very interesting and informative.

In most of the essays in this book I found ideas I'd never considered that eventually reworked nearly my entire conception of wilderness and mainstream society's relationship with it. I highly recommend this great collection of essays to those who enjoy thinking about our place in this world in new and brilliant ways.

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Uncommon Ground has done a great job articulating many essays into a collective book on our view of nature. As a researcher and ecologist, I have found the book a wonderful tool for bridging the gap between ideologies in nature and morals.

Cronon's lead essay in this volume is seminal for environmental thinking. In it, Cronon argues that we cannot conceive nature/wilderness and humans as separate. He also argues that we cannot think of "nature" merely as a feature of the world, but also as an idea constructed by humans. The rest of the essays reflect the result of a year-long symposium at UC-Irvine on rethinking nature. Contributors include some very influential figures as well as young scholars, whose work is often (but not always!) weaker than that of the more established scholars. This book has greater coherence than most edited volumes, thanks to the ongoing symposium. Even after twenty years, some of these essays will challenge you to rethink how you imagine "nature." Some are overly specialized and

insufficiently insightful, and drag the book down a bit. Even so, this book well deserves the influence it has had.

This anthology of hand-picked articles on the environment and man's relationship with it could be the finest go-to source for students and laymen interested in the subject. The book reflects the diversity and multidisciplinary of issues that make up the environmental crisis. In *Uncommon Ground*, readers will find thought-provoking pieces that deal with environmental history, natural resource management, popular representations of the natural world as well as social and cultural commentary with a special focus on the man-nature relationship. Alongside textual resources, this edition also includes numerous paintings, photographs, clippings and other items that are relevant to the subject. William Cronon, perhaps the best living writer in the field, is the perfect editor to guide readers through the book. *Uncommon Ground* is ultimately a coherent, unified narrative that offers a comprehensive discussion on themes introduced in Cronon's lead essay.

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